



Testimony in Opposition to Elimination of the State Commission on the Status of Women
Submitted by the Women's Foundation of California and Supported by 68 Sign-on Organizations
September 27th 2004

The Women's Foundation of California and the 68 organizations who have signed on to this testimony are **opposed to the California Performance Review recommendation to eliminate the State Commission on the Status of Women.**

The Commission was established in 1965 as an Advisory Commission under Governor Pat Brown, and signed into statute as a permanent independent Commission in 1971 by Governor Ronald Reagan. These governors both recognized what is unfortunately still true today — that the women of California are not faring as well as the men. There continue to be numerous disparities:

- ◆ Women represent the greatest number of those living in poverty. Using the federal poverty measure, in 2000, 37% of single female-headed households lived in poverty. This percentage increases to 65% when a more accurate poverty measure for California, the Self Sufficiency Standard, is applied.
- ◆ Women constitute the largest percentage of the uninsured;
- ◆ Women care for the majority of our children and elders;
- ◆ Women are the vast majority of domestic violence and sexual assault victims;
- ◆ Women continue to be paid less than men, even when they have comparable education and skills. In 2000, women in California earned an average of 82% of men's earnings. And,
- ◆ Women are under-represented in elected office and leadership positions in both the public and private sector. Women comprise only 28% of State Senators and 30% of State Assemblymembers.

The need for an independent voice for women and girls within state government is clear. In fact, the process for public input to the California Performance Review has been extremely limited and vague. The Commission has provided information to its partners and constituents on the CPR process thereby increasing public knowledge of state government process. The Commission has served as an important link between

many communities and the government throughout its history, focusing on those who most need a voice—the working poor, those with limited English language ability, incarcerated women, and those with least access to state government and services.

The Commission's original purpose, which was to study, recommend and advise the Governor and the Legislature on inequities in laws, practices and conditions that affect women, is as significant today as it was nearly 40 years ago.

In meeting its mandate, the Commission has partnered with numerous groups throughout California, thus *making state government both more accessible to these groups and benefiting state government by bringing these voices to Sacramento*. They have partnered, for example, in projects supporting pay equity, highlighting the needs of Latinas, young women, working families and older women, and documenting the economic status of women in California. Their availability to the Governor's office and the Legislature as a resource on the needs of women and girls is a significant benefit to the State. Their review and monitoring of pending legislation and advocacy on behalf of women and girls helps ensure that state policymakers consider the concerns of more than 50% of the State's population.

Citizen input is a fundamental principle of the democratic process. The State Commission on the Status of Women has been structured to insure that members do not serve at the pleasure of an elected official. We believe it is important to maintain a group of diverse, representative members who serve fixed terms. **Therefore, it is critical that the Commission be retained and preserved as an independent body.** To do otherwise threatens to silence the independent voice of women within state government.

Through its work with statewide organizations, local and state government agencies, and individual citizens, the Commission is able to bring the concerns of women and girls in California to state policymakers. The people have and will continue to look to the Commission for information and assistance. The organizations listed below represent only a small portion of those who have worked with and/or received assistance from the Commission.

An independent State Commission on the Status of Women not only demonstrates California's commitment to women, but also enables the State to provide national leadership on issues impacting women and their families. Historically, the Commission has played a significant role in helping California become a national leader in enacting landmark public policies in the areas of Family Leave, Equity in Athletics, Community Property, Reproductive Freedom, Sexual Harassment in Employment, and Health Care.

The Commission remains important now, more than ever, because of the critical need for good public policy, which requires good policy analysis. While we believe it is never the intent to create policy that will have a negative impact on women and girls, without adequate gender analysis it is often the unintended outcome. In a State where women remain underrepresented, good gender analysis is critical — the

Commission plays a major role in this task. As we look ahead we anticipate that the benefits of applying a gender analysis to issues such as human trafficking, older workers, affordable health care for all Californians, education and services to immigrant populations, the incarcerated and their families, as well as rural and low-to-moderate income populations will be critical.

In conclusion, we believe that eliminating this important Commission will silence many communities in California and jeopardize California's position as a national role model. The people, as well as the government, need the State Commission on the Status of Women. Therefore, we ask that you retain it as a resource for the State and the nation.

List of Organizations that have Signed-On to the Preceding Testimony

A New Way of Life

Advocacy Coalition for Tulare County for Women and Girls

AltaMed Health Services Corporation

American Association of University Women - California

American Civil Liberties Union

American Civil Liberties Union of San Diego & Imperial Counties

American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists, District IX

Association of Women's Health, Obstetric, and Neonatal Nurses

Bair Consulting

California Black Health Network

California Black Women's Health Project - Los Angeles

California Center for Research on Women and Families

California Church Impact

California Coalition Against Sexual Assault

California Coalition for Reproductive Freedom

California Federation of Business & Professional Women

California Institute for Mental Health

California National Organization for Women

California Nurses Association

California Nurse-Midwives Association

California Primary Care Association

California Women Lawyers
California Women's Agenda
California Women's Law Center
California Women's Mental Health Policy Council
Centennial United Methodist Women
Coalition of Women from Asia and the Middle East
Community Health Partnership
Department on the Status of Women, City and County of San Francisco
Equal Rights Advocates
Feminist Majority Foundation
Fifty-Fifty Leadership
Friends of the Pasadena Commission on the Status of Women
Girl Scout Councils of California
Health Care for All California
Hispanas Organized for Political Equality
Jefferson Economic Development Institute
Junior League of San Francisco, Inc.
Lambda Letters Project
Latino Coalition for a Healthy California
Latino Issues Forum
Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger & Homelessness
Marin Women's Commission, County of Marin
Marj Plumb & Associates
Muir Trail Girl Scout Council

National Abortion Rights Action League - Pro-Choice California

National Economic Development and Law Center

National Latina Health Organization

National Organization for Women - Monterey Peninsula Chapter

National Women's Political Caucus of California

National Women's Political Caucus San Francisco

Noe Valley Ministry Presbyterian Church

Older Women's League of California

Opportunities for Technology Information Careers

Organización en California de Líderes Campesinas, Inc.

Pasadena Commission on the Status of Women

Pharmacy Access Partnership

Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health®

Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California

Riverside County Commission for Women

San Luis Obispo County Commission on the Status of Women

Service Employees International Union - Local 535

Ventura County Commission for Women

Women in Technology International

Women At Work

Women's Health Collaborative

Women's Leadership Alliance

Working Partnerships USA

